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ABSTRACT

Industrial capitalism has encroached on household production and women's family work. In a series of interviews with women in 1979, the importance of women's activities outside the household, yet within the infrastructures on which they relied for carrying on housework and child care, became evident. The concept of work would be expanded to include the work of women as a mediating connection between the home and workplace and/or state. Women's domestic labor has been taken outside the home and/or reorganized and placed back in the home deliberately to reduce problems for capitalism and the state in capitalist society. Both private organizations and public agencies have organized their own work processes to pull in free labor of women. The source of changes in unpaid labor are complex and include owners' "dewaging" of work to increase profits, cuts in social welfare services to reduce costs, legitimization of the changes by ideologies that value individual solutions, gender relations that view women as more suited to self-service work, the ideology of democratic relations between classes, and conflicting interests among women involving race, class, and occupation. (YLB)

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FEMINIST RECENTERINGS OF KNOWLEDGE: UNPAID WORK FOR CAPITAL--WOMEN'S DOMESTICITY REEXAMINED.*

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1. **RECENTERING.** Background. A feminist recentering of knowledge suggests to me not only new understanding, but something about thinking about what to do to develop that understanding. Thus, I want to say a few words about my own rather crooked path of the last five years. My current work was provoked initially by examining studies on the sex division of labor in the household, and the encroachment of industrial capitalism on household production and women's family work. I concluded that the conceptualization of domestic labor was peculiarly arid. I suspected that this was because scholars had fastened upon a narrow set of questions, and had adopted an ahistorical view of domestic labor. This meant, respectively, only perfunctory attention to the social formations in which domestic labor was done, (by mainstream analysts) or a highly abstract analysis of connections (by many socialist feminists). (There has been much more concrete work since I started all this.) Too often domestic labor was viewed as if it were a phenomenon that could be given a definition that holds across cultures and time.

As a feminist and a Marxist, I wanted to approach the topic from another perspective. First, I thought that we needed more

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specific attention to what women actually did in their everyday lives. This prompted me to do a set of interviews in 1979 -- mainly of women in capitalist and socialist countries in Europe. I asked women to describe their daily routines from awakening to going to bed, and to tell me if and when any routine was a problem. The importance of women's activities outside the household, yet within the infrastructures on which they relied for carrying on housework and child care, became evident. This contradicted the conventional sociological view that women's domestic responsiblities are located usually within the household. It contradicts, too, the understanding that when women's domestic responsiblities bring them outside the household, the activity is still done for the members of the household, that it is social reproduction only.

The Marxist concept of social reproduction has been important in directing many socialist feminist analyses to the connections between paid and unpaid work, between the family and the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism. However, the analyses of social reproduction even when these are quite concrete (e.g., Greenwald on education) seem to continue to hold to a conception of spheres -- to a divide between the public and the private spheres, between waged and unwaged labor; and to see appropriation as only through the wage relationship.

My approach was to be historically concrete, to trace as specifically as possible what it is that women do outside the household that is critical for and organized by specific social relations of capitalism and by the state. I do this within a

frame that assumes that capitalism is a critical relation of domination that gives the fundamental shape to relations of gender domination. It means taking Marx as a guide, and not as a text from which to "read" mechanically what is going on currently. It means looking at women's actions, beliefs, interpretations and about themselves, their families and their domestic activities and about social ideals. It includes attention to the paid workers' attempts to control the conditions of their employment.

The Sociological Issue. My guiding question was: Have organizations outside the household reorganized themselves in various ways so that they become dependent on what women do in the course of carrying out domestic labor. More formally stated, how have social relations outside the household changed women's domestic labor in the United States (in this century) by requiring of them labor for organizations outside the home -- not just as social reproduction for the family but as part of production? In what ways does women's unpaid labor serve as a mediating relationship, connecting the household to social relations of capitalism and to the state in capitalist society? These are the interrelated and historically specific questions that prompt my current research and this paper. I now will discuss briefly:

1. First, the underlying theoretical issues with which I am concerned;

2. Second, the work of women as a mediating connection between the home and the workplace and/or the state;and the work transfer

by which women's domestic labor is appropriated by capitalism, and give some brief examples.

3. Third, I will mention briefly some of the sources, including ideological supports, for the connection. (I have elsewhere described aspects of capitalism that contribute to the process in retailing. 2)

4. Finally, I will indicate some conclusions.

I. CHANGING THE CONCEPT OF UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK.

Now, to turn to an expanded concept of work that involves women's domestic work as mediating device, and permits capital to appropriate unwaged labor.3 A caveat: Some writers -- feminists and non-feminists alike -- argue for extending the concept of work without any theoretical purpose -- willy-nilly -- to all kinds of human activity. I would reject this as not useful. It is again ahistorical and neglects the structural context of capitalism and gender relations within which work can be understood. Work is, after all, a social relationship, not just an activity. Furthermore, if nearly everything is "work," we can no longer distinguish among relations, and can easily ignore relations of domination. Such verbal expansionism could neutralize the politics of a feminist analysis, that is, our attempts to recognize the importance of women's domestic work. While I argue today for an expansion of the concept of work to include a mediating area, I am also arguing for maintaining the link to capitalism and to gender relations of domination. My attempt is not to revalue to make women feel good about themselves by

"relabelling". It is to explore how women's domestic labor is taken outside the home, and/or reorganized and placed back in the home, deliberately to reduce problems for capitalism and the state in capitalist society.

Seeing women's unpaid work as more than narrowly domestic means this : It means seeing that some of what women do as domestic labor provides a direct link between the public and the private sphere, with the relations being through the labor of women. The particulars of the labor which I have been exploring is work that is appropriated by capitalism and by the state. The mechanisms by which this occurs vary, and I have time only to note that both private organizations and public agencies can organize their own work processes to pull in the free labor of women. Women's unwaged labor is appropriated to meet the goals of these organizations. For example, state agencies may alter rules in hospitals and clinics, or in payments for homecare so that the chronically ill, disabled or otherwise dependent persons no longer receive care from experts. Thus, for dependents to consume health care, women family members (especially in the working class) must enter a work relationship. Among more affluent stratum, a woman may be "a cooperative caretaker", living in the hospital with a sick spouse or child, and doing the work routines once done by paid nurses.

II. <u>THEORETICAL ISSUES</u>. There are a varierty of underlying conceptual issues. These have to do with conceptualizations of (i) <u>spheres</u> or domains and (ii) the nature of the <u>boundaries</u>

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between the domains. Also relevant is how labor changes. The different spheres are, of course, the private and the public seen often, respectively, as that of women and of men. For many reasons, women are seen as relatively outside the public sphere. Moreover, conceptualizations of the boundary between the family and other social relations tend to be murky. The boundary seems to be seen as relatively impermeable even though this view may be rejected explicitly. A separation often seems to be made between society, on the one hand, and the family, on the other. (This is certainly a reflection of ideologies that devalue women and women's place. Think of the strangeness of thinking about the influence of "society" on politics, or of "society" on the economy.) Many feminists scholars, especially historians and anthropologists, have critiqued this view.

However, in spite of sharp and cogent feminist criticisms, when it comes to conceptualizing domestic labor, the division of social relations into two separate spheres seems to persist. Work women do as waged workers is seen as related directly to capitalism, while unpaid labor, (i.e., social reproduction of the relations of capitalism) is seen as inevitably only an indirect relationship.

(1) This assumes that the division of work into paid and unpaid captures adequately all categories of human labor. It assumes that work can be defined universally, without historical specificity.

(2) This assumes that unpaid work is done <u>in</u> and/or <u>for</u> the household directly, that women's activities outside the

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household are (a) done soley for the family, directly, and only done indirectly to support social relations of capitalism. Unpaid labor is seen as directly contributing to the daily reproduction of the family, and only indirectly contributing to the reproduction of the social relations of capitalism.

(3) Women's waged work but not women's unwaged work is subject to appropriation by capitalists. This is because the concept of appropriation is assumed to mean necessarily a wage relations.

(4) It also means ignoring relations women have directly to capitalism, outside of the wage relationship. Women's waged labor is sometimes seen as a necessary precondition our experiencing class oppression and developing working class consciousness. Thus, nonemployed women are seen as outside or experiencing class relationships only indirectly. (See Acker, 1984, MS for a an exploration of the social relations of distibution as a critique.) I do not accept the view that wage labor is a necessary experience for the development of women's class consciousness. However, those who do can recognize that this medial area of labor creates for unwaged women the experience of having their labor appropriated (even thought it does not create exchange value).

III. CAPITALISM, IDEOLOGY AND DOMESTIC LABOR. The source of changes in unpaid labor are complex. To mention a few quickly:

First, turning to capitalism: The drive to accumulate presses owners and managers to find new ways to reduce their own

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costs. The wage relationship involves both the actual cost of the wage bill and specific social relationships including struggles with workers that threaten profits, and productivity. Dewaging work by transferring labor once done for wages to women in their family relationships (as wives, mothers, daughters and daughters-in-laws,etc.) lowers the wage bill and may decrease some problems of control over workers. (True, customers and consumers may resist. 4)

Second, as far as the state is concerned, over the last decade, the drive has been to reduce the social welfare costs. There is no question but that this can be seen as an attack by capitalists on the entitlements of the working and the middle classes. But, we must also take the perspective of women. Then, we can see a deliberate strategy to reduce costs that increases the domestic responsibilties of women, especially but not only among working class and poor women.

Cuts in services have been rationalized as good for users--for example, as reducing some kind of evil of dependency on the state, or in speeding individual independence. But it means that women are pressed to assume responsiblities for nursing (as earlier they were in shopts) at the very time that both married women and single women heads of households have increasingly taken paid work.

A very recent attempt to reduce state (and eventually corporate) health costs is the new DRG (diagnostic related grouping) adopted for Medicare. The DRGs will shorten hospital stays, and shift care for the recovering person nursing homes,

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most certainly, but also back to the family. Since the private sector follows what the government designs, this is likely to effect private insurance holders shortly.)

Third, ideologies legitimate the changes. The American ideolgoy of individual choice and privacy is used to make the work seem personally beneficial. For example, both retailers and hospital administrators emphasize the advantage of privacy, respectively, in self-service shopping and hospital cooperative caretaking. No doubt, there are advantages. However, in evaluations, the added work responsiblities of women is ignored. The presentation of care outside of institutions exploits the self-help theme of the anti-expert consumer movement of the 1960s, wirthout necessarily lowering costs for the patients-doer. It exploits the ideology of the value of individual in preference to collective solutions to personal problems.

Four, gender relations are critical in self-service. Ideologies about gender legitimate the view of women as by nature and by nurture more suited for all varieties of bodily care that are home- and family-centered. Women, not men, and even women employed full-time outside the home, take on self-service work. In turn, this use of women rests on our relatively poor position in the labor market and dependency on the welfare state -- that is, she, not he, loses least by leaving the labor force to do do self-service. She, not he, takes it on along with other so-called women's work.

Probably most of the work is transfered among women. In retailing, it went from poorly paid women clerks to women

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shoppers. In health care, it goes from women and minorities to women and minorities -- from poorly paid support staff, nurses aides, vocational or practical nurses to women in the families of the sick or disabled. But much work is also transferred to women in the lower levels and perhaps even the upper levels of the middle income households.

Five, American ideologies assert both the absence of classes and that there must be democratic relations between classes. This may account for some of the uneasiness among women, even across class lines though usually most emphatically not across gender lines, about the serving relationships. (The upper class is excluded from this statement.)5 Many working class women may be more comfortable 'doing it themselves" than being waited upon.

In contrast, there is an absence of such ideology in Western Europe. There class resentments may be strong. Women may be just as resentful of the service relationship, but lack a recourse to a legitimating ideology that makes for a reciprocal uneasiness, rahter than a one way that is class-based. This may have contributed to the slower rate at which self-service has been established there.

Six, there are conflicting interests among women involving race, class and occupation. Women's struggles in the workplace itself have repercussions on the organization of domestic labor. That is, struggles among women, not just between workers and capitalists, and between women and men, may affect the reorganization of unpaid labor. Race, class and occupational

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interests conflict with the interests of women who act as family caretakers. Take the struggle of registered nurses to establish themselves as "professional" and specifically to gain more autonomy in relation to physicians. Nurses are trying to establish nursing as a highly specialized activitiy that cannot be divided into detail work. Team nursing which epitomizes a detail division of labor is being displaced by primary nursing care, where 3 RNs split a 24 hour shift. It is argued that skilled care is needed as more acutely ill persons seek care. Hence, nurses aides and practical & vocational nurses are said to be ineffective and unnecessary. Nurses also define educating patients and their families in self-care as one of their critical functions. Ironically, in the cooperative care system, waged women workers are eliminated, and the family member does the less skilled nursing once done by vccational and pracical nurses.

Racism and class conflict among nurses may also be important. Registered nurses, the nursing stratum with the most formal training, are likely to be white and, increasingly, from higher income families compared to their predecessors. Lower levels non-registered nurses (aides, LVNs and LPNs) are likely to minorities and from poor and working class families. The professionalization of nursing aids the former at the expense of the latter. Patient caretakers, of course, come from all social classes, though certainly women from the ruling class and their allies are less likely to be involved outside the hospital itself compared to working class and poor women. The former women are perhaps more likely to be invovled in in-hospital care.

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IV. SUMMARY:

In the interest of time, I have only mentioned materials briefly from my case study of the emergence of self-service in the retail industry in the United States. I have also only drawn illustrations from self-service (self-care) in the health system.

I have tried to recenter the analysis of domestic labor -- a recentering of scholarship on women -- by examining what different women do. I argue that the old categories of the public and private, so rightly criticized by feminist scholars, prevent us from making sense of certain kinds of work that women do as family members. My analysis has been historical, and uses a Marxist framework, but rejects the meaning of work from a male perspective that sees only waged work as appropriated by capital. I note that class conflicts between women must also be examined concretely and historically.

I conclude that women's domestic work is not captured adequately theoretically by the division of labor into the private sphere of domestic labor and the public sphere of paid work. I suggest that we must be historically specific, distinguishing when and how women's domestic labor is done for the maintenance of capitalism, maintaining the working class and supporting existing relations of gender domination, on the one hand, and when it supports divisions between women. We can reject the conception of the household as a site for women's domestic labor and/or the need to refer always back to the household for locating what it is that women do. Rather we can

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see that women's unpaid labor crosses the boundary between the family and other social relations. and makes for direct links.

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2 For more details about women's paid and unpaid work in the retail trade industry in the United States see Glazer, Nona Y., "The Invisible Intersection: Women's Self-Service, Paid Work and Capital," Radical Review of Political Economics, 16(3), Spring 1984, Special Issue on Women in the Economy. In process: Serving Capital: Self-Service & Women's Paid and Unpaid Labor.

3 Glazer-Malbin, Nona, 1976. Housework, Signs, vol 1(3). See also, Hochschild, Arlie, 1981. The Managed Heart, (Berkeley: University of Calfornia); Fox, Bonnie, Hidden in the Household, 1981 (Toronto).

4 Retailers, for example, complain that customers refuse to rehang dresses in shops. Potential home caretakers may do nursing care ineptly, or refuse to do it at all, and thus create a need for some alternative care system. However, by and large, especially working class and poor consumers and users of goods and services from both the private and public sectors cooperate because they may have few alternatives.

5 The serving relationship (buyer-clerk, patient-nurse) was and is often between low status service workers and their social superiors, that is, between paid workers who are low status often by virtue of race as well as gender and class, and because of relatively low technical skills, and sometimes their doing "dirty". for low wages. The women served may be petty bourgeoise and upper stratum of the working class women.

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